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ABSTRACT

This action agenda focuses on quality child care for the Seattle (Washington) King County area. Poverty rates are high in King County, and quality child care is vital to breaking the cycle of poverty that traps many African-American families. A needs assessment in King County identified many areas for the improvement of child-care services. These are grouped into the following areas of concern (1) self-esteem and cultural awareness; (2) parental involvement; (3) environment and safety; (4) discipline; (5) staffing and staff development; (5) management and administration; (6) curriculum; and (7) community resources. This Action Agenda and the Program Recommendations provide a blueprint to unite child car providers, child advocates, and parents into an effective coalition to increase the availability and the quality of child care services in the community. The first agenda item will be to expand training for child care providers and staff to ensure high-quality experiences for African-American children. A second priority will be to develop a network of resources for parents to ensure that they receive the services they need to provide physical and emotional well being for their children. (SLD)

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ACTION AGENDA

Quality Care for African American Children

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Black Child Development Institute-Seattle, Washington

African American Child Care Task Force

National Black Child Development Institute

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Seattle Black Child Development Institute and the African American Child Care Task Force formed a working partnership to address the need for comprehensive child care services in our community. We gratefully acknowledge the participation of the following individuals, child care programs, and institutions who collaborated on the development of this Action Agenda.

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Participating Child Care Programs

ABC's Daycare
Adeebas Playhouse
Alleas Baldwin Child Care Home
B-B's Daycare
Beacon Child Development Center
Cassie's Loving Care
Cherry Hill Childcare
Childhaven
Community Day School Association
Concord Children's Center
Creative Beginnings
Damascus Child Care Center
Denny Park Children's Center
First Step
Gentle Dragon
Happy Medium School
Holly Park Childhaven
Holly Park Community Day Care
Jeannette's Day Care Home
Kids Club
Denise Louie Early Childhood Education Center
Love's Nest Day Care Center
Martin Luther King Day Home
Mt. Zion Preschool
Noah's Ark
Northwest Latchkey, Inc.
Our Place Daycare Center
Pauline's Day Care Home
Primm Day Care Center
Rainbow Learning Center
Seattle C.C.C. Child Care Center
Sheron's Day Care Home
Smiling Faces Daycare Home
Tall Cedars Child Care Center
YWCA Child Care @ WIAT
Zion Prep Academy

Organizations and Agencies

City of Seattle Department of Housing and Human Services

Department of Social & Health Services Child Care Licensors, Region IV

Seattle Central Community College

Mt. Zion Preschool

East Cherry YWCA

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National Black Child Development Institute .....Inside Back Cover

National Black Child Development Institute believes that every child has the right to safe, affordable, quality child care while his/her parents are at work.

Black Child Development Institute-Seattle, established in 1974, is dedicated to improving education, child care, health care, and child welfare for African American children and families in Seattle, King County, and Washington State. BCDI-Seattle conducts public policy forums, monitors and testifies at school board meetings, provides training and workshops for foster care parents and workers, convenes an annual conference, and conducts in-service training for Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence (SETCLAE). BCDI-Seattle also provides scholarships to African American high school graduates and co-sponsors the Ronald McNair Science Camp-In each year.

ACTION AGENDA: QUALITY CARE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

This ACTION AGENDA focuses on quality child care because of the critical importance of early childhood education in the healthy growth and positive development of children. It was developed by child care professionals, parents, and child advocates who believe that early childhood education is the number one priority for ensuring the well-being of our children.

We also believe that only by uniting in effective coalitions can we raise the priority of children's issues in King County.

Together we can make a difference. Now is the time for action.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Poverty rates are alarmingly high among King County's African American children. More than one third (35.7%) of African American children ages birth to four live in poverty, compared to 7% of their white counterparts; 34.3% of African American five-year-olds are in poverty, compared to 7.6% of white five-year-olds; and 28.9% of African American children ages six to eleven live in poverty, compared to 6.3% of white children in that age group.

Quality child care is vital to breaking the cycle of poverty that traps many African American families. Access to child care removes a major barrier to parents being able to work. And, as many studies show, a quality early learning experience for children can enhance later school success and lower the high school dropout rate.

The cycle of educational failures dramatizes the need for reinforcing early educational development. Although African Americans have significantly increased high school completion rates over the last decade, their dropout rate is still the highest among the five major ethnic groups in Washington State. Achievement test scores for African American students range from 20 to 45 percent below their white counterparts. In the Seattle Public Schools, African Americans experience the lowest achievement scores and the highest number of disciplinary actions of the major ethnic groups.

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The figures for higher education are equally alarming. The percentage of African Americans attending colleges and universities increased in the brief period between 1970 and 1975, but since then, they have not changed. In fact, there is a marked decline in the proportion of African Americans who actually receive a degree.

Our Children Need Quality Child Care

In spite of its importance to the well-being of children and their families, the availability of child care in King County follows the same pattern of severe shortage that is evidenced all across the country. The number of licensed child care slots—40,194—is a stark contrast to the estimated 75,000 children who need child care services. It is estimated that almost half of these children may need child care subsidies, but currently less than 5,000 receive such assistance through public subsidies.

Furthermore, children who are enrolled in Head Start and the State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) receive care 2½ to 3 hours per day for 128 days a year. For working parents and for parents who desire to work, these hours represent a barrier to full employment.

Our Children Need Your Help

This Action Agenda and the Program Recommendations provide a blueprint to unite child care providers, child advocates, and parents into an effective coalition to increase the availability and the quality of child care services in our community. Our goal is to create, strengthen, and expand high quality, culturally relevant child care programs that are safe, affordable, and accessible, particularly for low-income African American families.

Only by working together can we raise the priority of children's issues in King County. Collectively, we must mobilize our community and governmental resources to eliminate the unacceptable gap between available child care services and the type of coordinated child care services our children need.

Children have no vote, but as society's most vulnerable, they are profoundly affected by the decisions of local, state, and federal policymakers. We who care about and care for children must come together to challenge elected officials to become more responsive to their needs.

The stakes are high.

Who, if not us, will be responsible for our children?

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

BCDI-Seattle, in cooperation with the African American Child Care Task Force, undertook a year-long project to evaluate child care programs serving African American children in King County and to obtain community recommendations for improvement. Through a Survey of child care providers, a Curriculum Consultation focused on the early education and child care needs of African American children, involvement of child care advocates and community representatives in a Child Care Summit and a Community Forum, and NBCDI's document *Safeguards: Guidelines for Establishing Programs for Four-Year-Olds in the Public Schools*, participants developed recommendations in the areas of:

- Self Esteem/Cultural Awareness
- Parental Involvement
- Environment/Safety
- Discipline
- Staffing/Staff Development
- Management/Administration
- Curriculum
- Community Resources

The definitions, guidelines, and performance criteria for each of the focus areas were developed using the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.

SELF-ESTEEM/CULTURAL AWARENESS

Interactions between children and staff should be characterized by warmth, personal respect, individuality, positive support, and responsiveness. An important goal should be to help children learn to value and appreciate differences. Children of all races, religions, and cultures should be treated with equal respect; however, this does not necessarily mean that they should all be treated the same.

Recommendations:

- Recognize that self-esteem can be enhanced by meeting a child's basic needs, including positive cultural group identity.
- Mandate that educational institutions incorporate culture-specific/anti-bias curriculum courses as a requirement to obtain a certificate or degree.
- Require state licensors, child care subsidy program monitors, Head Start/ECEAP program monitors, technical colleges' on-site trainers, and Child Care Resources technical assistance personnel to have culturally specific training.
- Require early childhood professionals to obtain training to facilitate a working knowledge of African American children.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The word parent is used in the broadest sense possible. It includes grandparents, foster parents, and extended family members. Parents should be well informed about the program and welcomed as observers and contributors. It is a self-esteem booster to both parent and child. Ongoing communication between parents

and early childhood professionals should include the child's daily activities and not be limited to times when there is a problem. Parents can become empowered through skill development and meaningful interactions with teachers, administrators, and site councils.

Recommendations:

- Develop statements of policy regarding parental involvement that specify the form, type, and frequency of interaction.
- Provide parenting classes, support groups, and information and referral services for parents.
- Establish mechanisms to ensure parental involvement in decision making.
- Empower parents to advocate for the needs of African American families in a formal way to decision-makers, funders, media, and other child care professionals.
- Encourage parents to volunteer in areas which value their strengths.
- Incorporate other forms of parental involvement such as after-hours projects, parent committees, and regular parent meetings.

ENVIRONMENT/SAFETY

The indoor and outdoor physical environment should foster optimal growth and development through opportunities for exploration and learning. To deliver quality care, appropriate materials, equipment, and facilities are needed.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Facilities, Equipment, and Repair Fund for programs serving low-income children financed by United Way, City of Seattle, King County, the State of Washington, and other appropriate partners.
- Provide ongoing training for professionals on creating quality environments for children in child care programs.
- Create an inviting, nurturing, colorful, and safe environment that features children's work and other pictures displayed at the eye level of children.
- Incorporate into the environment materials that reflect the culture of African American children.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline strategies should be based on the explanation and understanding of consistent, clear rules. They should involve the use of positive techniques of guidance, including redirecting, anticipation of and elimination of potential problems, positive reinforcement and encouragement, rather than competition, comparison, or criticism.

Recommendations:

- Provide continuing education and in-service training which incorporate developmentally and culturally appropriate practice as well as social and emotional development.
- Help children develop problem-solving and self-discipline techniques.
- Partner with parents to promote consistency in articulating expectations to children.
- Facilitate an understanding of the relationship between the structure of the environment and behavior.

STAFFING/STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The most important factor influencing the quality of an early childhood education program is the caregiver. The creation of the entire learning atmosphere is largely dependent upon the teacher. Therefore, child care/early childhood education programs should employ highly trained individuals and use experienced personnel.

Recommendations:

- Create a model for delivering training to African American child care professionals to include the following components:

  —Intensive outreach;
  —Systematic credentialing;
  —On-site training and/or training in accessible locations;
  —Provision for substitute child care personnel;
  —Flexible days and times; and,
  —Curriculum design to meet the cultural and cognitive needs of African American staff.

  The State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Seattle Central Community College should work with BCDI-Seattle and the African American Child Care Task Force to create the model.

- Require culturally relevant/anti-bias training as a prerequisite for licensing or re-licensing of child care programs.
- Implement an Early Childhood Education Track leading to advanced degrees at the University of Washington.
- Recognize the expertise of experienced child care professionals by assisting them to access college and univerisity programs that give credit for life experience.
- Urge the State Department of Social and Health Services to earmark funds for basic health coverage to child care professionals employed at sites serving a high percentage of DSHS subsidized children.
- Advocate for equity of education and career advancement opportunities, salaries, and benefits for child care professionals serving low-income children through fair and equitable reallocation of resources.

MANAGEMENT/ADMINISTRATION

Programs should be efficiently and effectively administered with attention to the needs and desires of children, parents, and staff. The training and experience of directors is a major factor in the overall quality of program administration. Preferably, center directors should have at minimum a Bachelors degree in management or early childhood education or related education field. Directors should have previous work experience in a child development program. Training in management and staff-parent relations should also be required.

Recommendations:

- Establish mentoring programs—through Child Care Resources—to enhance the managerial expertise of program administrators.
- Increase access to management development and training programs by providing incentives and scholarships to administrators in sites serving predominantly low-income children.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum should reflect all that experts know to be developmentally appropriate for young children: there should be a variety of activities in which the children may choose to participate; routine activities should be built into the daily schedule; there should be flexibility to allow for spontaneity; the schedule should be well-balanced with provisions for both teacher- and child-oriented activities, taking into account the personality, interests, and varied strengths of individual children; and learning should be active, not passive.

Recommendations:

- Provide opportunities for nationally recognized African American early childhood education experts to present at conferences such as the local Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Emphasize activities, such as answering open-ended questions or learning through discovery, which lay the foundation for building higher-order skills. Also focus on activities which build the precursors to skills in science, math, language arts, and computer literacy.
- Expose all early childhood professionals to forms of training that include curriculum design and pedagogical skills that are appropriate for working with African American children.
- Ensure that the holistic needs of each child are met through frequent monitoring of classroom activities and periodic assessments of program goals. Parents, teachers, and administrators must all be involved in ongoing re-evaluation.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Staff should be knowledgeable about and use community resources—including state, local, and federal governmental programs, business initiatives, nonprofit service organizations, and other professionals—both as a supplement to the child care program's resources and as a referral source for parents.

Recommendations:

- Develop a network of resources for families with a particular emphasis on the needs of African American families which can be accessed through their child care programs.
- Improve access to services and information provided by Child Care Resources through targeted outreach to African American directors.
- Advocate that King County and the City of Seattle create a Fund Developer position to secure government and business financial support for child care programs that serve large numbers of African American children.
- Create mentorships between African American child care professionals and the African American Child Care Task Force for the purpose of networking and sharing knowledge about community resources and training opportunities.
- Maximize comprehensive child care services to low-income African American children and families by ensuring that the recommendations contained in this Action Agenda are an integral part of the planning, policy, and programmatic early childhood education solutions being proposed by the following entities:

  Washington Association for the Education of Young Children
  Puget Sound Association for the Education of Young Children

Child Care Directors Association of Greater Seattle
Children's Alliance
Child Care Resources
Child Care Works
Success by 6
Washington State Child Care Coordinating Committee
Washington State Office of Child Care Policy
Washington State Division of Children and Family Services
Washington State Department of Community Resources
Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
King County Department of Human Services
Seattle King County Public Health
City of Seattle Department of Housing and Human Services
Seattle Public Schools

PRIORITY ACTION AGENDA

During the comprehensive assessment of child care programs, BCDI-Seattle and the African American Child Care Task Force identified two items that are of critical importance to the delivery of quality child care/early childhood education services to African American children in King County:

- Expanded staff training for child care providers; and
- A resource network to provide comprehensive services for families in need.

Because of their immediate importance, these two items will comprise the priority Action Agenda for BCDI-Seattle and the Task Force in the coming year.

The most important factor influencing the quality of child care/early childhood education program is the maintenance of a stable, qualified, well-trained staff. Throughout the project, participants expressed a major need to enhance staff training and to obtain and maintain qualified, committed staff. They also expressed a desire for more training funds, culturally relevant training, and leave time for staff to participate in training programs. Therefore,

ACTION AGENDA# 1 is to expand training options for child care providers and their staff to enhance the quality of early childhood education/child care experiences of African American children.

In Seattle, 25% of African American families face the stresses of poverty and managing a household with few resources. These families need a broad range of services that include the traditional parent education and parent involvement activities as well as information and resources that will enable them to provide the most stable home possible. These resources include access to housing information, health services, drug abuse prevention and treatment services, and job training and placement services. Child care providers can be an important link to help with these critical family needs. Therefore,

ACTION AGENDA # 2 is to develop a network of resources that will enable parents to receive the services they need in the areas of housing, health, economic self-sufficiency, food and nutrition services, parent education, and involvement in their child's early education.

BCDI-Seattle and the Task Force will work to expand and strengthen our community coalition of child care professionals, child advocates, and organizations and develop specific strategies to address these immediate needs.

As we develop an organizational structure to carry out our many tasks, the coalition will also identify long-range strategies to address additional concerns covered in the Program Recommendations. If we combine our efforts, we can begin to make systemic changes in the delivery of early childhood education/child care services to African American children in Seattle.

Our children need your help. Contact Yvonne Ervin Carr, President, BCDI-Seattle P.O. Box 22483, Seattle, WA 98122. Telephone (206) 722-7277.

NATIONAL BLACK CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The National Black Child Development Institute in Washington, D.C. was founded in 1970 to improve the quality of life for African American children. NBCDI focuses primarily on health, child welfare, education, and child care/early childhood education by monitoring public policy issues and educating the public.

NBCDI's Stand on Child Care

NBCDI believes that the availability of developmental child care promotes and strengthens the well-being of children and their families. By developmental child care, we refer to programs which consider the "total needs" of the child and the family. Quality, affordable child care must be available to all families. Every child is entitled to a child care experience that is developmentally appropriate to the age of the child and which meets the social and economic needs of the family. Such care must:

- recognize stages of growth and development in children;
- provide stimulating experiences designed to facilitate cognitive, social, physical, cultural and emotional development;
- attend to the health and nutrition needs of children; and
- promote nurturing and supportive responses to children.

Goal: A National Comprehensive Child Care Program

Incremental changes in existing child care policy must be pursued which will increase public and private support for child care services until such time as a national comprehensive child development program is secured. A national program should:

- facilitate the provision of child care in diverse facilities such as churches, family day care homes, full- and half-day center-based programs, and after-school and summer programs for school-aged children;
- provide optional health and nutrition services;
- include a strong parental involvement component in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of programs, as well as in the provision of services;
- address the need for child care services in each state for infants, preschoolers, and school-aged children, with special attention given to meeting the needs of victims of neglect and abuse, children of teenage parents, homeless children, and handicapped children;
- coordinate all federal programs which support the delivery of child care services;
- require that child care providers participate in training programs which lead to formal assessment and credentialling, such as the Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program (CDA); and
- promote the development and enforcement of state and local licensing standards to ensure the health and safety of children in out-of-home care.

In the absence of a comprehensive national policy, state and local policy should embrace the concept of developmental care through the enactment of programs and policy initiatives which meet these objectives.

For more information about NBCDI and its programs, contact:

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